

Dear Co-Chairs Kavros Degraw and Rahman, Vice-Chairs Chafee and Needleman, Ranking Members Zullo and Fazio, and members of the Planning and Development Committee,

I am writing in support of S.B. 998 and in opposition to H.B. 6294.

S.B. 998 would provide important tools to encourage property owners to protect trail corridors. As you may know, many recreational trails are on private lands. Measures that benefit property owners encourage more of them to allow their lands to be used for trails. Trail systems that would potentially benefit from this bill include the New England National Scenic Trail and portions of the 825 blue-blazed trails maintained by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association.

This bill would provide the following tools:

- 1) It would enable municipalities to be able to abate property taxes on a trails corridor that is also protected by a conservation easement. This is a permissive bill that would allow towns to choose this as one way to encourage landowners hosting trails to make a permanent commitment to recreational access; and
- 2) It would specifically allow towns to also consider a trail corridor to be an area eligible to receive a lower property tax rate under the P.A. 490 open space classification. This would have potential for immediate impact with towns that utilize the P.A. 490 open space program.

In contrast, H.B. 6294 would limit recreational use of lands. In the town where I live, zoning regulations provide for donations of land in connection with subdivision approval. Without this tool, my town would not have the same ability to protect open space for passive recreational enjoyment. The regulations allow for greater density in return for the donation of land, which seems like a fair tradeoff.

I am pleased to live in a town where 20 percent of the acreage is conserved land. Between town-owned preserves and land owned and maintained by the Guilford Land Conservation Trust, my small town on the south central Connecticut shoreline is a recreationist's delight. I am ever on the look out that it remains that way.

By way of background, I am a regular user of recreational trails. I lead hikes and train hike leaders for the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). I engage in conservation advocacy for AMC and the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. I also chair my local Conservation Commission and serve on the board of my local land trust.

Janet Ainsworth  
Guilford, CT